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ABSTRACT

Canada has traditionally supported a high level of unemployment benefits and retraining programs for its displaced workers. From the 1960s onward, legislation and attitudes in the business community have been geared toward retraining of workers for high-tech workplaces and the replacement of low-skill jobs with high-skill jobs. With increased globalization of industries, businesses found that they needed fewer numbers of highly trained workers. Downsizing and restructuring resulted in high rates of unemployment. At the same time, increasing pressure to reduce the national deficit and a swing toward more probusiness policies under the Mulroney government resulted in less support for unemployed persons and less money for retraining. Instead, emphasis was placed on quick reemployment at any available job in order to reduce the economic burden of worker support and training. Even budgeted funds that had been designated for the Canadian Job Strategy were not spent on retraining. As shown by the problems in the Nova Scotia fishing industry, however, even when retraining efforts were substantial, only about half the eligible workers took advantage of them. Those who were retrained were by and large younger, more educated, and male, whereas older, less educated workers and married women were less visible in retraining programs. These workers perceived that, even if they retrained, they were unlikely to gain employment in their own communities and were unwilling to move and to compete with younger, better-educated workers. These trends affect not only Canada but all countries when globalization is an ongoing phenomenon. (Contains 17 references.) (KC)

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Adult retraining in Canada: Some issues

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Lyotard's (1984, xxiii) famous book, The postmodern condition, is the outcome of a study which the Canadian government has commissioned him to conduct about 'the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies'. It seems undeniable that the society of Canada, a G-7 nation, is one of such 'most highly developed societies'. So it seems quite appropriate that Canadian government has interest in the condition of knowledge which should affect the society it governs, provided that this condition differs from that of not-most-highly-developed societies. Actually, recent developments in the Canadian workplace, especially the upsurge of the retraining discourse, seem to suggest that some new condition of knowledge is indeed taking effect as far as Canadian workers' material life is concerned. In this paper, I shall attempt to elaborate some of the bearings of this discourse.

For two decades, Canada's business community has been emphasising its 'capacity to innovate . . . in the enhancement of skills and know-how and in the organization of work and remuneration' (Betcherman et al. 1990). The skills and know-how concerned were of course those of advanced technology often called 'hi tech'. The focus of innovation in the organisation of work and remuneration was on making business operations viable on the globalising market as characterised by internationalised finance and commodity production. The viability of business operation required 'flexibility and mobility' if it was to profitably adapt itself to diverse, often volatile market situations.1 The 'capacity to innovate', therefore, meant the capacity to incorporate advanced technology into the production system and restructure the latter accordingly. The business community went even further. It lobbied governments of different levels to cut spendings and restructure public-sector operations in order to reduce deficits and thus help make Canada's financial market attractive to the border-crossing multinational investment funds. The governments reacted positively. Thus, restructuring became a widespread phenomenon in private and public sectors.

The thrust for restructuring bore directly upon employment. The hi-tech production system did not demand as many workers as the low-tech production system. Restructuring, therefore, meant downsizing and layoffs. Meanwhile, flexibility of business operation implied that even those fortunate workers who had managed to survive layoffs were at risk unless their skills were indispensable to the changing workplace. Permanent employment became increasingly a matter of the past. Finally, mobility of business operation suggested not only individual workers

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but the entire community could lose the opportunity of employment where the community depended on a single employer. Employers, on the other hand, had their own kind of problems to deal with. One such problem was that it was not easy for them to find a sufficient number of qualified workers to man their new hi-tech production system. Thus, as Hinds (1990, 303) notes, restructuring in Canada has resulted in a troublesome 'imbalance between job vacancies for skilled and professional jobs in general and the continuing high rate of unemployment'.

The recent retraining discourse emerged in this context. The author of a 1983 background paper submitted to an Employment and Immigration Canada task force, for instance, observed that as much as 40% of Canada's work force was already in need of retraining or upgrading or would be in need of it in the next few years of the decade. He also observed that by 1990, 'this group plus perhaps another 20% of the workforce [would] need to be trained all over again' (Feather 1983, 30-1). The bearings of this discourse may be conveniently examined in terms of the trainees concerned: employed workers, displaced workers, and the communities affected by restructuring.

Many employers were interested in retraining their own workers. As of 1992, one of four Canadian employers was providing employees with some kind of retraining. Especially concerned were those who manufactured for the overseas market using hi-tech know-how. For such businesses, the principles of flexibility and mobility required a small number of hi-tech workers to function actively and cooperatively. As Osberg et al. (1995, 52-3) take note of at the Aerospace Manufacturing's Nova Scotia plant, such businesses sought to form and run an optimal team of workers by means of 'leadership' and 'motivation'. The key point of leadership was 'equity in administration by top management' and that of motivation 'the social skills/attitudes of workers'. Naturally, employer-provided in-service training programmes tended to lay emphasis on development of social skills for the purpose of enhancing 'cultural integration' (Beckerman 1992, 21) in the workplace, more than on technical training itself. According to Robertson (Ibid., 18-28), such major employers like GM Canada, Northern Telecom and McDonnell Douglas preferred 'communication', 'interpersonal skills', 'cultural training' and 'supportive cultural environment' to technical training. The latter in their training programmes contained mainly specific skills required for the restructured workplace situation workers were hired to, for instance, the simple skills in a marketing department to use one Lotus 1-2-3 screen, mastery of the manual in a machine shop for operating a newly acquired Toshiba CNC, and so on.

Whereas, the employed workers were interested in technical training more than in social or cultural skills. The security of their employment in the rapidly changing world of work depended on their capacity to 'be innovative and responsive to changing technology and market demands' (Meltz 1990, 284). They wanted the sort of training which could serve their needs for expanding that capacity. A policy paper adopted in 1989 by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) took technical training to be a 'right', 'a tool for greater equity' and 'a fundamental part of the job', and stated that the content of training should be 'geared to workers needs as they see them' (Ibid., 87-103). Since employers did not, and could not, satisfy such needs, the policy paper proposed to levy a new training tax on employers so that the state--a 'welfare state' as it was supposed to be--could deliver training services to the workers in need using the monies thus raised. At the same time, unions persuaded their employers to concede on a paid education/training leave and

tuition fee subsidies for off-site retraining. And by the early 1990s, union locals at GM Canada (CAW), Chrysler Canada (CAW), A.G. Simpson (CAW), Ontarios community colleges (CAAT) and Canada Post (CUPW) had succeeded in obtaining such concessions from their employers.

Such efforts can be properly understood in reference to the seriousness of labours concern about the dwindling jobs in Canadian industries. In 1989, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) had declared that Canadian workers were going through 'the worst crisis since the Great Depression' (Ibid., 104). Unemployment became a nasty question during the last two decades. The unemployment rate for the year 1995 was 9.5%, which meant 1.4% increase from that for 1990.2 In some regions the rates remained constantly well above 20%. If industrial restructuring keeps going on,3 and if the flexible and mobile Canadian businesses keep diversifying their operation and crossing their national borders,4 the unemployment rate will continue to rise.

Given that surviving restructuring demanded possession of the skills required by the hi-tech workplace, and, more fundamentally, that work was an essential condition for earning a living, the right claims to retraining should be valid to all workers--equally to displaced workers as to employed workers. The OFL policy paper, therefore, demanded retraining services for displaced workers as well. Resorting to the same concept of welfare state, again, it asked that such services be provided through state-funded programmes run in conjunction with public educational institutions. It also asked that displaced workers be provided with a substantial amount of income support (covering 90% of previous wage levels) in order thereby to facilitate their smooth transition to re-employment.

The position of the government, however, was somewhat different. True, the Canadian government entertained the concept of welfare state fairly faithfully up until recently. And it has earned a world-wide reputation. Its policies for displaced workers as well were reputable. It provided the unemployed with necessary job information and actually found positions for them. The 1960 Technical and Vocational Training Act, the 1967 Adult Occupational Training Act and the 1982 National Training Act added more positive governmental roles. The 1967 Act provided for funding technical/professional training at the junior college level and programmes for training in the actual workplace. The 1982 Act created a Skills Growth Fund for strategic training in the occupations of manpower shortage. In addition, the government has been providing--since the early 1940s--unemployment insurance (UI) services. Significant changes, however, began to occur since Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's landslide victory at the 1983 general election. The new government sought to perform major surgeries to the long-entrenched welfare-state principles in order to accommodate 'neo-liberal' policies, such as the elimination of tariff protection (free trade), the deregulation of business operations, the privatisation of crown corporations, business-friendly tax reforms, and deficit fights aimed at reduction in governmental services. The purpose of all this was the backing up of Canadian-originated businesses on the globalising world market. Retraining displaced workers in such a new policy context was considered not just in light of supporting displaced workers in their hard life but, more importantly, to reduce the government's financial burden for UI and other welfare programmes by rushing them to some immediate gainful occupation.

A plan which the Mulroney government worked out in 1985 for this purpose was a

Canadian Job Strategy (CJS). This strategy was comprehensive. It included programmes for subsidising employers training workers in high-demand skills, for upgrading employed workers' skills, for pre-entry trainings, for job development for long-unemployed workers, and for the single-employer communities in which restructuring had resulted in massive layoffs (Leigh 1990, 72-6). As regards the retraining of unemployed workers, the focal concern of this strategy was exactly the reduction of the number of those drawing upon UI and other welfare funds. This was apparent in the exclusion of recently unemployed workers from the retraining programmes listed above.5 The Mulroney government committed the largest portion of the CJS fund to 'Job Development' programmes. To labour's disappointment, however, it did not undertake an active role in such programmes. Instead, it chose to defray costs of retraining in approved private programmes. Labour advocates call it a 'privatization of training'.6 The results of Job Development programmes do not seem to be as successful as in the programmes of other categories, considered in light of the number of actual trainees (see Table 1).

A Statistics Canada study (Picot 1987) discovered a few interesting phenomena from survey on the CJS-supported retraining programmes for displaced workers. Since retraining was a necessary condition for re-employment, it appeared to the researcher to be likely that all displaced workers take advantage of the offered training opportunities. But the displaced workers reacted differently. The number of trainees decreased substantially with age. Very few people above 40 years of age actually took part in retraining.7 As well, the displaced workers at lower educational brackets (with elementary and some secondary education) and married women were less visible in retraining programmes. Furthermore, about 50% of those who had been long-term unemployed in 1983--that is, before the commencement of the 1985 retraining programmes--tended not to partake, among them again age, level of education and sex (married women) being visible factors. Finally, retraining in low-demand occupations ('the toughest market') attracted less trainees than retraining in high-demand occupations. These findings are interesting because they suggest that retraining for readjustment to the changing workplace is more sensible to the younger and better educated workers who are interested in competitively obtaining employment in high-demand occupations. Put in another way, retraining for readjustment was not a feasible option for many of those who were older, less educated and less motivated to compete in high-demand occupations.

Witnesses to a Senate subcommittee's hearing filed complaints that CJS's eligibility rules were 'unfair and counter-productive', and that they excluded the recently unemployed, the severely employment disadvantaged, older workers, individuals in threatened occupations, smaller communities, and young people (SCTE 1987, 14). But the Mulroney government did not take such equity-related complaints as seriously as its 'election mandate' to restructure public-sector operations and reduce deficits. It did not exhaust even the minimal funds it had allotted to the CJS operation. In the 1985-86 fiscal year, for instance, it underspent some 20% of the original CJS budget in spite of the fact that the CJS with the prorated expenditures had been worked out as the best money-saving plan (Ibid., 13).8

The problems of retraining displaced workers, especially the feasibility of retraining for such workers, have been felt more strongly in governmental policies on single-employer and single-industry communities. Historically, in Canada, numerous communities emerged and submerged along with a business operation--pulp mill, mining operation, hydro facility, and the

like. Government operations such as military base as well gave similar effect to some communities. The restructuring of private-and public-sector operations placed such communities in a highly vulnerable and precarious position. Primary industries--farming, logging, hunting, and fishing--as well were putting the communities at risk which depend solely on them, for these industries were all declining.9 Recently, in this connection, serious developments took place in Atlantic Canada.

The world-largest northern cod fish stocks around the Island of Newfoundland have been depleting rapidly and at last hit a level at which their commercial exploitation became not feasible. Scientists are yet to determine the exact cause. There is, however, no question that advanced fishing technology assumes a large portion of the blame.10 In 1992, the Mulroney government announced a two-year moratorium on the cod fishery--the Northern Cod Adjustment and Recovery Program (NCARP)--in the hope that the fish would return shortly. The fish, however, did not come back. So in 1994, the new Jean Chretien government announced an even longer and extensive Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS). The latter disallowed catching not only cod but other groundfish--the fish feeding off the grounds of the ocean, such as cod, halibut and turbot--for 5 years and asked fishermen to surrender their fishing licences for compensation. Virtually, thus, the centuries-old industry reached an end, leaving jobless hundreds of cod-dependent communities along the coasts of Newfoundland. This event may appear to be similar to what happened to the community where the single employer closed its business operation. But in reality it was much more serious. It was so not only due to the number of affected individuals and communities but also due to the fact that many fishermen and fisherwomen were not educated enough to seek retraining for other occupations.

The government of course paid attention to such communities. As mentioned, the CJS included a 'Community Futures' programme for troubled single-employer communities. This programme adopted three measures. It sought to help develop small local businesses or some other job-creating activities, on one hand. On the other, it subsidised relocation and travel for employment elsewhere. Finally, it offered displaced workers the opportunity of retraining by defraying costs for attending classroom training in approved institutions. In short, the CJS employed a double policy of helping the troubled community survive if it came up with some viable alternative economic activity and, if not, helping it sink smoothly. Retraining was intended to serve this double policy.

The retraining policies for the communities affected by the cod-fishery closure followed generally the same veins but with some variances. Since the NCARP presupposed the return of the fish in two years, its training programmes included the option of retraining for work inside the fishery. In persuading the affected fishing communities, the government promised that the temporarily displaced fisherpersons would become 'professional' fishermen or fisherwomen, trawlermen or plant workers by the time the fish hit back Newfoundland shores (NCARP 1993). And it indeed committed a substantial amount of money to that effect. In effect, many fisherpersons--men and women--enrolled in retraining classes pursued upgrading in their fishing and fish-processing skills. Whereas, TAGS was worked out at a time when the dwindling fish stocks did not permit any hope for the revival of the fishery in a near future and, notably, when the worsening budgetary situation disallowed the kind of generosity which the Mulroney

government exhibited in its compensation package. The retraining programme in TAGS echoed the double policy in the CJS's 'Community Futures' programme--career planning and counselling, mobility assistance and support for re-employment, literacy and basic skills training, and support for entrepreneurship (TAGS 1994)--with much reduced financial commitments (see Anonymous 1994).

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the Fisheries Adjustment Programme developed and delivered by the Cabot College, St. John's, as part of the NCARP package. The fishermen and fisherwomen who were young and educated enough to resist frustrations were relatively persistent in seeking new skills or upgrading old skills through the retraining classes. But those who were not so seem to be pessimistic about the usefulness of retraining. About 45% of the 1,000 fisherwomen or fish plant workers interviewed by the Women's Committee of the Fishermen, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW) stated that retraining was 'not a viable option' or 'a waste of time and money' (FFAW Women's Committee 1994, 12). When their communities had practically no prospect of having alternative industries, newly acquired skills would not be useful unless employment was sought elsewhere. And given that the displaced fisheries workers had not been so well educated, the new skills they could pick up from retraining classes would likely be ones in which the labour market [was] already flooded' (Women's Fish Net undated, 4). This would mean searching jobs elsewhere virtually pointless.

This cursory examination of the Canadian scene of retraining adult workers does not yield sufficient grounds for judging on the usefulness of retraining in the rapidly changing world of work in advanced technology societies. Nor does it for judging on the effectiveness of the policies adopted by the Canadian government for coping with new changes. When low-tech jobs are replaced by hi-tech jobs, and when an industry yields to another industry, retraining may well be the logical option for policymakers to choose. But when such changes occur at a time of market globalisation, the effect of retraining policies will be significantly reduced. The reason is not that the government in place is unfriendly to workers, but that the globalising world market restricts the protective power of the individual state.

Jobs will continue to disappear as restructuring goes on. Single-industry communities will continue to break down as globalisation goes on. And state protection of displaced workers will gradually diminish. Adult educators for the 'postmodern' workplace of this 'most highly developed' society will have to read the true meaning of the retraining discourse against such historical trends. But are these trends a 'local' issue confined to Canadian adult educators when globalisation is an ongoing phenomenon?

Notes

1. This is what Harvey (1992, 141-72) points to as a 'postmodern' condition for business operation.
2. See 'Canada at a glance', http://www.statscan.ca.
3. With restructuring going on, Picot and Pyper (1993) report, a large volume of permanent layoffs occurs during both recessions and expansions. According to their study, over one million Canadian workers were permanently laid off each year during the 1980s.
4. Gorecki (1992) takes diversification of enterprise to be an explanatory factor for the firms becoming multinational.
5. According to Picot and Wannell (1987), among those laid-off workers who found new jobs in the early 1980s, 25% did so within three weeks, and 10% took more than a year. Of those who found new jobs, 55% gained in wages while 45% lost. Generally, permanently laid-off workers performed poorly in finding new jobs. Their unemployment rate in 1986 was 25%.
6. The Mulroney government's policy for the 'privatization of training' is well addressed in Calvert and Kuehn (1993). See chapter 7.
7. Kramar (1985) also reports a similar phenomenon from a case study conducted in the Hamilton region, Ontario.
8. During the 3 years from 1984 to 1986, the Mulroney government reduced federal funding for training and labour market adjustment by 32% (Ibid., 13).
9. Not many people in Canada are engaged in primary industries. As of 1995, out of the 14,927,600 Canadian labour force, 9,852,400 were employed in service industries, 3,653,100 in goods industries, 430,500 in agriculture, and 295,700 in other primary industries. Compared with 1990, service industries gained 5.3% in labour force while all the rest lost. See 'Canada at a glance'.
10. Weeks and Mazany (1983, 25-9), for instance, point to over-capacity in both harvesting and processing sectors as the foremost problem of Atlantic fisheries. Hinds (1995, 282) writes: 'Canada's Atlantic offshore fishing fleet was modernized and upgraded in the 1960s in an effort to compete with foreign fishing in the North-West Atlantic. The increased Canadian offshore effort produced large increases in offshore catches. Thereafter, the general effects of stock depletion resulted in severely declining catches despite continued high effort'.

Table 1.
CJS component programmes,1986-1987

Programmes	Committed money($millions)	Number of trainees
	182.2	70.9
Skills Shortages (employers)	41.2	17.8
Skills Investment (employed)	402.9	149.0
Job Entry	768.7	176.2
Job Development	63.5	3.1
Community Futures(single-industry communities)	14.8	N/A
Innovations (pilot projects)		

Note: 'Job Entry' includes women having difficulty regaining a job after absence from the workforce.
Source: Leigh 1990, 73. Rearranged.

Table 2
Year One results, 1990-91 (number of students)

Type of programme	Registered	To Year 2 program	Graduated
Pre-employment (< 1 yr duration)	24	2	66
Technology (2-3 yr duration)	27	25	N/A

Source: Cabot College (undated). Rearranged.

Table 3
Year Two results, 1991-1992 (number of students)

Type of programme	Registered	To Year 2 program	Graduated
Pre-employment (< 1 yr duration)	29	N/A	22
Technology (2-3 yr duration)	31	22	5
Adult basic education	18	11	3(at Grade 12)

Source: Cabot College (undated). Rearranged.

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